

**Opening Statement of Tom Bliley, M.C.
Chairman, Committee on Commerce
Thursday, April 10, 1997
Joint Subcommittee Hearing on the
Science Behind EPA's Proposed Revisions
to the NAAQS for Ozone and Particulate Matter**

Thank you very much Chairman [Barton or Bilirakis], and I would like to commend both you and Chairman [Barton or Bilirakis] for holding today's hearing.

The laws regulating this nation's air quality have been under a bright spotlight in recent months – and rightly so. The Environmental Protection Agency has issued air quality proposal that would dramatically increase the government's regulation of the air we breathe. These proposals would make the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ground-level ozone and particulate matter significantly more stringent, bringing hundreds of additional American communities under federal controls. They are major regulatory proposals and they merit our immediate and

careful attention.

The purpose of today's hearing is to explore the science behind EPA's proposed standards, but let's begin on common ground: We all share the goal of effective and achievable air quality standards to ensure clean air and good health for all Americans. The question for this Committee, and for the American public, is whether EPA's proposals will help us achieve this goal.

For several months now, the Committee has been trying to educate itself about EPA's proposals, including the quality of the scientific evidence underlying them and the benefits that Americans can reasonably expect if they are finalized. We also have been attempting to gather the relevant data, documents, and other background materials pertinent to EPA's rulemakings.

Since EPA officials have stated time and again that their Agency is committed to a full and open public review of these proposals, we did not expect this fact-gathering to be a difficult step in our education process. Unfortunately, we were wrong: the Committee has faced roadblocks at nearly every turn in our efforts to gain a full understanding of these new rules -- most of them set up by EPA.

It was EPA that attempted to suppress criticism about its proposals from the President's Office of Management and Budget. It was EPA that withheld relevant information and documents from this Committee. And it was EPA that refused to use its authority to obtain and make available for independent analysis the data and other materials underlying the key, taxpayer-funded studies upon which it has relied in proposing these rules.

These actions by EPA have cast a shadow of doubt upon EPA's credibility when it comes to these Clean Air Act revisions.

I am also awaiting additional documents from a number of agencies and I expect that all responsive documents will be produced as soon as possible.

Let me be clear: as Chairman of this Committee, my goal is to ensure that all members of Congress have the most accurate and complete information about these proposals before we take official positions on them. At present, I am not a critic of these new air standards, but I am a vocal critic of EPA's repeated attempts to shield the proposals from legitimate Congressional scrutiny. EPA should be prepared to defend the bases for its own proposals, not hide from them. The American public deserves nothing less.

To this end, the Committee and its subcommittees will be

conducting a series of hearings to hopefully get some clear answers to some basic questions about EPA's proposed standards. We begin this process today, by exploring the scientific justification for these rules.

The two subcommittees jointly conducting today's hearing have put together an impressive panel consisting of the current and three former Chairmen of EPA's Clean Air Science Advisory Committee, known as CASAC (*Note to TB: pronounced "kay-sack"*). I understand that this is the first time that these four gentlemen have all appeared to testify together on these new rules and we are honored to have them here today to discuss CASAC's scientific review and analysis of EPA's proposals.

While I imagine that our panelists will express diverse, personal views in their testimony today, my hope is that this

hearing will serve to clarify what the scientific community actually knows about the basis for these proposed rules, and to explore the limits of our knowledge and current uncertainties in this area.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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